The Miracle of Saint Anthony

Maurice Maeterlinck

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THE MIRACLE OF SAINT ANTHONY

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The Miracle of Saint Anthony

BY

MAURICE MAETERLINCK

Translated by

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This play was written some ten or twelve years ago, but has never been published or performed in the original. A translation in two acts was printed in Germany a few years before the war; but the present is the only authorized version, in its final, one-act form, that has hitherto appeared in any language.

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS.
CHELSEA, 27 *February,* 1918.

CHARACTERS

Saint Anthony
Gustave
Achille
The Doctor
The Rector
Joseph
The Commissary of Police
A Police-sergeant
A Policeman
Mademoiselle Hortense
Virginie
Léontine, an old lady
Valentine, a young girl
Other Relations and Guests

The action takes place in the present century, in a small Flemish provincial town.

INTRODUCTION

" The Miracle of St. Anthony "— whatever the exact date of its writing, and that is a point which the author himself has probably forgotten,— belongs in flavour and spirit, to that early period of the career of the Belgian seer and mystic to which Mr. James Huneker referred when he wrote " There is no denying the fact that at one time Maeterlinck meant for most people a crazy crow, masquerading in tail feathers plucked from the Swan of Avon." For it was to Shakespeare that he was first compared, though the title " the Belgian Shakespeare " was applied ironically by some, just as later mani-

festations of his genius won for him the appellation of "the Belgian Emerson." But "The Miracle of St. Anthony" differs from the other plays of what may be called "the early Maeterlinck." Most of them, to quote Mr. Edward Thomas, have a melancholy, a romance of unreality, a morbidity, combined with innocence, which piques our indulgence. He has no irony to put us on the defensive. But irony is the very essence of "The Miracle of St. Anthony." Nor does the scene of the little play belong to that land of illusion, that mystic border country, half twilight and half mirage, in which so many of the early plays were laid. The St. Anthony from whom the satire takes its title may be the blessed St. Anthony of Padua, but the atmosphere is unmistakably the gray, sombre Flemish atmosphere that Maeterlinck knew in his early youth, while the

Marionettes who speak the lines were drawn, not from Fairy-land, but from some town of the Low-Countries.

Maeterlinck's nationality was not a mere chance of birth, but a heritage of many generations. The Flemish family of which he was born in Ghent on August 29, 1862, had for six centuries been settled in the neighborhood. His childhood was passed at Oostacker, in a house on the bank of a canal connecting Ghent with Terneuzen. So near was the water that the ships seemed to be sliding through the garden itself. The seven years spent at the Jesuit college of St. Barbe were not happy years, but there were developed his first literary aspirations, and there he formed certain friendships that lasted into later life. At the University, where he studied for the Bar, he met Émile Verhaeren, who was destined to stand out with

King Albert, Cardinal Mercier, and Maeterlinck, as one of the great figures of the land when Belgium came to experience her agony.

But it was not in Maeterlinck to settle down to a lawyer's work and a bourgeois life. "Like Rodenbach," said M. Edouard Schuré, "he had dreamed alongside the sleeping waters of Belgium and in the dead cities, and, though his dream did not become a paralysing reverie, thanks to his vigorous and healthy body, he was already troubled in such a way that he was unlikely to accept the conditions of a legal career." So, when at twenty four, he made his first trip to Paris, though the visit was professedly in the interests of his studies, it was with the result that he plunged definitely and whole heartedly into literature. To Villiers de l'Isle Adam, and others of the ultra modern school, he

was introduced by an old *copain* of the Jesuit college, Gregoire Le Roy. Le Roy read to the group Maeterlinck's "The Massacre of the Innocents," a perfectly Flemish piece of objective realism. It was applauded, and soon after appeared in "La Pléïde," a short-lived review which also printed some of the poems collected in "Serres Chaudes."

That first stay in Paris was one of about six months. Returning to Ghent, he conformed to the wishes of his family to the extent of dabbling a little at the Bar. But his heart was with "La Jeune Belgique," to which he had been introduced by Rodenbach, author of "Bruges la Morte," and for which he was writing his poems. Then in 1889, when he was twenty-seven years of age, "Serres Chaudes" was published, and with it went the last tie binding him to the law.

Continuing to live in his native Oostacker, his days were divided between writing, tending his bees, and outdoor pastimes. As a member of the Civic Guard of Ghent he was as poor an amateur soldier as Balzac had been when enrolled in the National Guard of the France of his time. His musket was allowed to rust until the night before an inspection. Material surroundings meant little to him. As with Barrie, the four walls were enough. He could people the homely room to suit his fancy. In imagination a table became a mountain range, a chair the nave of a superb cathedral, a side-board a limitless expanse of surging ocean. Through the window he could look out over a country suggesting the scene of his early play, "Les Sept Princesses," "A dark land of marshes, of pools, and of oak and pine forests. Between enormous willows a straight and

gloomy canal, on which a great ship of war advances."

"La Princesse Maleine," which also appeared in 1889, had been first privately printed by the author himself, on a hand press. With it Maeterlinck was launched into the fierce light of fame. Octave Mirbeau wrote of it in the *Figaro* of Paris. He said that no one could be more unknown than the author, but that his book was a masterpiece, "comparable — shall I dare say it? superior in beauty to the most beautiful in Shakespeare." There were less generous critics who suggested that the play was Shakespeare, because it had been made with scraps of Shakespeare. A champion of Maeterlinck retorted that in comparison with Maleine and Hjalmar the characters of Shakespeare were marionettes. So the storm raged, to the author's infinite disgust. Finally in a spirit of

modesty and frank acknowledgment he called the play "Shakespearterie." There was no pose in that assumption of humility. From all testimony he has ever been the same. Invited to a dinner his acceptance has been conditional on absolute simplicity. "After all, I am a peasant." It was Gerard Harry who quoted that. Again, at the end of a first night of one of his plays, he has been described as "modest, simple, altogether without display in dress or manner. His gestures were gentle with reflection, his voice low and rarely heard. He had no pride of success, but an air at once uneasy and detached, as if tired of being there. His deep blue eye was cold and mournful, like a mirror that retains the images of indefinite and impalpable things, as Barbey d'Aurevilly says the eyes always are of those who look more within than without.

His brow was deep and square and shone pale. He made the observer think of his own untranslatable words:

> Sous l'eau du songe qui s'élève
> Mon âme a peur, mon âme a peur.

The same writer says that, by way of contrast, the playwright keeps bees and teaches a dog to sing; he calls him a sportsman, a man always getting about, a great drinker of ale — a great boy, a Bohemian. Here also may be discerned the writer in praise of the sword, the fist, and the automobile, the friend of the bull-dog and the creator of Tylo. That was describing the Maeterlinck of the early days.[1] He seems never to have greatly changed.[17] Was not almost the last picture of him that we had before the outbreak of the Great War one of poet playing with pugilist at the manly art of self-defense — the author of

" L'Oiseau Bleu " sparring and wrestling daily with the French champion Carpentier?

New influences began to show in Maeterlinck's work. His Introduction to his translation from the Flemish of Ruysbroeck l'Admirable's " L'Ornement des Noces Spirituelles " made public his interest in Plato, Plotinous, Novalis, Jacob Behman, and Coleridge. He published a translation of Novalis's " Disciples et Sais." His feeling for Emerson had become such that he wrote an Introduction to the Essays of the American that had been translated into French by I. Will. To that period of his career as a playwright belong " Les Sept Princesses," the little plays, " L'Intruse," and " Les Aveugles," " Pélléas et Mélisande," " Alladine et Palomides," " Interieur," and " La Mort de Tintagiles." Then, in 1896, he left

Oostacker for good, and settled in Paris. In the same year he published "Le Tresor des Humbles," his first volume of Essays, and "Aglavaine et Selysette." In a letter to Madame Maeterlinck he said that Aglavaine brought him "a new atmosphere, a will to happiness, a power to hope." Henceforth her light will direct him in a "serene, happy and consoling course." Also it was about that time that his life was joined to the life of Georgette Leblanc.

In "La Vie Belge," published in 1905, Camille Lemonnier told of Maeterlinck's first meeting with the talented woman who was to become his wife. It took place in a house in the Rue Ducale in Brussels, the home of Edmond Picard, the great barrister and patron of Belgian literature. One midnight, after a performance of Strindberg's "Father" at the Théâtre

du Parc, all were invited there for supper. Maeterlinck, who still lived in Flanders, had left his bees, and was there, grave, silent, dreaming, a little out of his element, as he always was in the city. He was truly himself only in the country, his pipe in his coarse peasant fingers, filling its black bowl with a fresh pinch of tobacco from time to time. I had known him at the house of the painter, Claus, at whose door he sometimes leaped from his wheel, bare-necked, muscular, broad of shoulders and loins, a regular country boy from the village. This great, silent, contemplative spirit little knew that he was about to see appear, under the guise of the charming Georgette Blanc, the very visage of his destiny. A great silence spread from the far end of the hall, and suddenly she entered, stately and slow, with the jewel of her *ferronière* on her forehead, like a sign

of the empire, in the long swishing of her train. Picard presented them; she gave a little cry; and he looked at her, embarrassed, with his deep-set peasant eyes, bowing awkwardly, while, with a deep reverence like a rite, the beautiful actress, with the ceremonious grace of a little queen of Byzantium, dedicated to him, without a word, the homage of her artist's worship. Maeterlinck looked at her a great deal, but scarcely spoke to her during supper.

But if his tongue was backward, there were other ways of wooing. "Le Tresor des Humbles" was dedicated to her. "La Sagesse et la Destinée" was dedicated to her, "as the result of her collaboration in thought and example: he had only to listen to her words and follow her life with his eyes when he wrote the book; for to do so was to follow the words, the

movements, the habits of wisdom itself." At any rate the woman understood. Perhaps she helped matters along a little. Perhaps her poise served to put the shy peasant at his ease. It was a wise union, a union destined for happiness. "Truly," said Gerard Harry of it, "henceforward he looks upon life less desperately and less fearfully." The glimpses that Mr. Edward Thomas gave of the *ménage* show Maeterlinck as he was in the last year or two of world peace, come to fifty years, in the full vigor of his mature powers, at the height of his popularity and material success. Nearly all his books are multiplied and repeated, by new editions and translations into many languages. Always independent, money could only add ease and opportunities for gratifying minor tastes. He spends the winter at Quatre Chemins near Grasse, in the south of France, the

summer at the ancient Benedictine Abbey of St. Wandrille, in the Department of Seine-Inferieure. But there is hardly a moment when Madame Maeterlinck is not a part of his life and work. She plays "Macbeth" in her husband's translation, while he smokes a pipe of peace as well as in solitude. The pipe, according to Gerard Harry, contains a denicotinised herb; for thus, by a piece of heroism discovered by his hero-worshipper, Maeterlinck circumvents his insatiable craving for tobacco in his working hours. "By wise disposition," says Madame Maeterlinck, "he has reduced his weakness, economised his strength, balanced his faculties, multiplied his energies, disciplined his instincts."

"Yet," says Mr. Thomas, "he continues to write. He is early to rise and go to his garden and his bees, for which his liking is now near thirty years old.

Two hours, always exactly two hours, of work follow. Then he goes out again, canoeing, motoring, cycling, or walking. He reads in the evening and goes to bed in good time." The work of these two hours is prepared easily and quietly during the pleasures and other duties of the day. Madame Maeterlinck compares him taking up his work to a child leaving its games and going on with them as soon as allowed — an innocent and ambiguous comparison. She implies that his work is sub-consciously matured and methodically put on paper, and that his natural tranquillity and the surroundings and conditions of his life have long been felicitously combined; and she says it might seem that the mysterious powers have woven between him and the world a veil which allows him a clear vision whilst yet himself invisible, as they have favored him by the gift of a home

not less wonderful than the castles he imagined for Alladine and Selysette and Meleine.

However in a consideration of "The Miracle of St. Anthony," the life of the man, his place as a philosopher, and his achievements as a poet are only indirectly concerned. The little play counts first of all in its relation to "La Princesse Maliene," "Les Sept Princesses," and especially, "Les Aveugles," and "L'Intruse." Perhaps closest to it of them all is "L'Intruse." To recall that play. It does not need the Dutch clock in the corner to fix the scene in the Lowlands. In a dimly lighted room in an old country house the grandfather, the father, the uncle, the three daughters are sitting about a table. It has rained the whole week and the night without is damp and cold. In the next room lies the sick mother. The

father is hopeful, relying on the assurances of the doctors. But not the grandfather. They are expecting some one. They speak in low voices, at random. Besides the woman in the other room there is a young child.

THE UNCLE — The little one would cause me more anxiety than your wife. It is now several weeks since he was born, and he has scarcely stirred. He has not cried once all the time! He is like a wax doll.

THE GRANDFATHER — I think he will be deaf — dumb, too, perhaps — the usual result of marriages between cousins. (*A reproving silence.*)

THE FATHER — I could almost wish him ill for the suffering he has caused his mother.

THE UNCLE — Be reasonable. It is

not the poor little thing's fault. He is quite alone in the room.

More and more is the old man troubled. He complains that he can no longer hear the nightingales, and that some one must be in the garden. The trees in the park are trembling as if some one was brushing a way through, the swans are scared, and the fishes diving in the pond, but the watch-dog does not bark. Through the glass door, that some mysterious agency has opened, the cold rushes into the room. The sound of a scythe being sharpened is heard outside. The child that has before been silent, begins to cry. There is a knock at the door. The Father partly opens it, and speaks to the servant, who answers, remaining on the outside.

THE GRANDFATHER — Your sister is at the door?

THE UNCLE — I can see only the servant.

THE FATHER — It was only the servant. (*To the servant*) Who was that, that came into the house?

A note is struck similar to one used later by Lord Dunsany in "A Night at an Inn." Some invisible force is pushing open the door. The servant protests that it is not she, as she is standing three yards away from the door. The Grandfather is conscious of a new presence. "And who is that sitting there?" he asks. "But there is no one there," he is told. But he will not believe them, maintaining that in pity they are deceiving him. A ray of moonlight penetrates, throwing strange gleams. The clock strikes midnight; at the last stroke there is a sound as of some one rising in haste. Cries of terror from the child's room: quick and heavy steps.

Then silence. The door of the sick woman's room slowly opens, and the Sister of Mercy appears on the threshold. She bows as she makes the sign of the Cross.

In " Les Aveugles " Maeterlinck turned from a typically Flemish setting to a forest on a small island —" a very ancient northern forest, eternal of aspect, beneath a sky profoundly starred." Six old blind men are on the right, and six old blind women on the left. They are from a Home for the Blind and they are in the charge of a priest — a very old priest, wrapped in a wide black cloak, and whose eyes, " dumb and fixed, no longer gaze at the visible side of eternity, and seem bleeding beneath a multitude of immemorial sorrows and of tears." Fear is in the hearts of the priest's charges. They are startled by the flutter of wings, by the touch of the falling snow, by the barking of dogs. They un-

derstand nothing save the sound of the sea and they do not know how near that is. In the priest's company they have been exploring their island, which has "a mountain that no one has climbed, valleys with no one to go down to, and caves that have not been entered to this day." They know not yet that the priest is dead, but they are conscious that something has happened to him. They offer conjectures, they dig into the past, they deplore their state. At length one of the men is led by a dog to the center, where the body of the priest is. He touches a face. The others follow and recognise by feeling the features of their protector. What are they to do? The only seeing eyes are those of a child at its mother's breast. The child cries at a noise, and they think that it must be something and move towards the sound that has provoked the cry. Their hope is that the

men from the light-house will see them. At last the footsteps stop. "Who are you?" asks the child's mother. But only silence. "Have pity on us," cries the oldest blind woman.

"It is not necessary to the effectiveness of this piece," Mr. Thomas has written, "that we should believe the blind to represent mankind bewildered after the loss of religion, their old guide. Whether it is true or not that religion is dead and men blind without it, the thought is so stale that in its nakedness it could be of no value to any piece of writing. But the sight of a blind man sitting still or tapping in the street is always impressive; and to the blind company in the play are added many elements of mystery and terror which enhance this impressiveness. They have at the start little more humanity than the rocks and trees among which they sit, ex-

cept that they are conscious of themselves and one another. They are like creatures suddenly made out of the rocks and trees; and it is easy to picture beings of equal humanity standing in the depths of a misty wood when rain falls all through the day at autumn's end. Or they are like personifications, so that we feel no curiosity with the name of any but that one who says for Maeterlinck:

We have never seen one another. We ask one another questions, and we reply; we live together, we are always together, but we know not what we are.

It was Maeterlinck's very first play, "La Princesse Maleine," that won for him the dangerous title of "The Belgian Shakespeare." Now and then a writer of our own land has done something that has

caused limited or injudicious critics to speak of him as "The American Dickens" or "The American Thackeray." As a rule he has paid a sad price for the unfortunate comparison. No matter how innocent the man himself has been, the chorus of mocking, unthinking laughter has been inevitable. In the case of Maeterlinck ridicule was only momentary. The rush of subsequent achievement was so swift. The world had had hardly time to gasp at Octave Mirbeau's "The Belgian Shakespeare" before some one else was referring to Maeterlinck as "The Belgian Emerson." But it did not need the acute mind of a Mirbeau to find the first comparison. That was obvious. How obvious a few references to "La Princesse Maleine" will show. To Maleine herself there is a flavor of Ophelia. The castle of Marcellos, her father, king of a part of Holland,

might be the Castle of Elsinore. There, when the play opens, is being held the banquet to celebrate the betrothal of Maleine and Prince Hjalmar. The watching guards gossip of the attentions that the Prince's father, old Hjalmar, king of another part of Holland, has been paying to the exiled Queen Ann of Jutland. A quarrel between the two kings over the table leads to war, and in an attack on the castle most of the defenders are killed and Maleine disappears. Through a hole in the wall of the tower in which Maleine and her nurse are shut up for safety, they see that the whole land has been laid waste by war and fire.

In the course of subsequent adventures Maleine becomes the attendant of Uglyane, the daughter of the wicked Queen Ann, whom Hjalmar is now to marry. In that capacity she carries to her mistress a

false message saying that Hjalmar is not going to keep a tryst, and instead goes herself. Later there is a knocking at a door, and Maleine enters in the white robes of a bride. Queen Ann tells old Hjalmar that he must choose between herself and the returned Princess, and plans to make use of a poison, which the physician determines to make harmless. Then there is another storm, and Maleine is alone in the night with a large black dog quivering in a corner of the room. Old Hjalmar and Queen Ann come to her door, and pretending to do her hair, the Queen twists a rope round Maleine's neck and strangles her. The madman, who at Maleine's previous appearance, pointing at her, had made the sign of the cross, thrusts his head in at the window but is hurled back into the moat by the king. The murderess puts the corpse to bed. In the fifth and last act the

same storm is raging. The castle is struck by lightning and a mass falls into the moat. Within all are asking for the king and Queen Ann. When they enter there are bloodstains in the king's white hair. Maleine's dead body is discovered, and the king drags in Ann, proclaiming her guilt and his own. Hjalmar stabs the murderess and then kills himself.

In " Les Sept Princesses " there is a vast hall of marble with seven white marble steps covered by seven pale silken cushions on which the seven princesses are sleeping. The sun is setting, and in its fading light may be seen a black marshy country and oak and pine forests. Along the canal between dark willows, a great warship advances. On the terrace the old king and queen and a messenger watch the approaching vessel. The king's vision fails him and it is the queen who describes the full spread

of sail touching the willows, and the oars like a thousand legs. From the ship, when the anchor drops, the prince descends. He is shown the seven sleepers, who are not to be awakened, as the doctor has forbidden it. "How white they are, all seven! Oh, how beautiful they are, all seven! How pale, how strange they are, all seven! But why are they asleep, all seven?" says the prince. He indicates his preference for one of the seven. "That," says the queen, "is Ursula, who has waited seven years for her lover." The others are Genevieve, Helen, Cristabel, Madeleine, Claire, and Claribella. Why was Marcellus so long in coming? Night and day they have been watching along the canal. The sailors turn the ship to a monotonous song with the burden, "We shall return no more, we shall return no more."

The sisters still sleep. The queen is frightened at the plight of her granddaughters and sobs against the window. the watchers seek to enter, but neither door nor window can be opened. The king and Marcellus make their way in through a subterranean passage. All the sleepers but Ursula awake. "She is not asleep," says the queen. "Pour water on her. . . . Open the door. . . . It is too late. . . . Shut! shut!" All cry, shaking the door, and knocking at the window: "Open, open!" A black curtain falls.

"Nobody," says Mr. Thomas, "who has read 'Les Aveugles' and 'L'Intruse' could doubt the authorship of 'Les Sept Princesses.' Here are the same agitated, helpless people speaking in abrupt, simple, and oft-repeated phrases. Here again something is going on which they do not understand, and are impotent to arrest or change. But the matter of both earlier

plays was a not improbable incident which was developed, it may be extravagantly, but in a manner that touched human beings. If 'Les Aveugles' was extraordinary, while 'L'Intruse' was not extraordinary in any way, both were easy to understand. But 'Les Sept Princesses' is a picture drawn for its own sake. It has its logic, but the elements in it seem chosen, like those of 'La Princesse Maleine,' because they are attractive in themselves — the marble hall and stairs, the terrace, the dark land of marshes and forests, the canal and the warship, the seven princesses in white sleeping on the stairs, the swans, the prince arriving to claim one of them and finding her at last dead, the old king and queen shut outside the hall and knocking vainly at the windows; only, these elements are combined without any of the unwieldiness of 'La Princesse Maleine,' without inter-

fering with themselves or with anything else. It is simply a picture in Maeterlinck's manner, and this manner has the effect of creating a feeling of helplessness and smallness in the presence of fate and the earth."

It was not until a later period that Maeterlinck came under the influence of the American Emerson. "A Belgian Emerson," Mr. James Huneker has said, "but an Emerson who had in him much of Edgar Allan Poe." Surely it was not through Emerson that Maeterlinck found the author of "The Raven." Nor is it certain that there was any direct inspiration at all. More likely it is that the same visions burned early in the brain of the Flemish mystic that had seethed in the mind of the gifted, erratic American half a century before. There was no need for him to know "The House of Usher" of

the Poe tale. Was there not a House of Usher perched on every Flemish hill, at the bottom of every Flemish valley? Was not the man a forerunner of Maeterlinck who wrote this?

"Now there are fine tales in the volumes of the Magi — in the iron-bound melancholy volumes of the Magi. Therein, I say, are glorious histories of the heaven and of the earth, and of the mighty sea — and of the genius that over-ruled the sea, and the earth, and the lofty heaven. There was much lore, too, in the sayings that were said by the Sybils, and holy, holy things were heard of old by the dim leaves which trembled round Dodona, but as Allah liveth, that fable which the Demon told me as he sat by my side in the shadow of the tomb, I hold to be the most wonderful of all."

Or this?

" And then did we, the seven, start from our seats in horror and stand trembling and aghast, for the tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings, and, varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon our ears in the well-remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends."

The landscape of most of those early Maeterlinck plays is the landscape of " Ulalume ":

> The skies they were ashen and sober,
> The leaves they were crisped and sear,
> It was night in the lonesome October
> In my most immemorial year.
> It was hard by the dim lake of Auber
> In the misty mid-region of Weir,
> It was down by the dark tarn of Auber
> In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

But it was a more material setting that

Maeterlinck gave to "The Miracle of St. Anthony." Not the intangible Nowhere or the impalpable At any Time, but the present day, a commonplace house, and a small provincial town in the Low Countries. Instead of stately marble pillars, or primeval forest, or limitless sea, a room with leather-covered benches against the walls, two wooden stoves and an umbrella stand, on which are hats, a cape and wraps. Instead of swans and sleeping beauties, the old drudge Virginie, with her skirts turned up and her legs bare, swabbing the floor. In the next room is lying the body of the Maiden Lady Hortensia, who in her lifetime had been exceedingly generous in her donations to the church, and especially devoted to the memory of the blessed St. Anthony of Padua. It is the Saint himself, come to restore her to life as a reward for her piety, who presents himself at the

door-sill as the curtain rises. In appearance he is not as the dead woman might have expected. Bare-headed and barefooted, his beard and hair are scrubby and tangled, and he is clothed in a soiled, sack-like, and much dirtied cowl. The story of how he was received by the relatives, the doctor, the parson, and the gathered guests may be read by those who turn to the following pages. It was first presented to American play-goers by the Washington Square Players under the direction of Mr. Edward Goodman at the Bandbox Theatre in New York, the evening of May 7th, 1915. It had the quality of novelty, for it was one of the least known of all the plays. There was a story current at the time that it was produced from the manuscript. What Maeterlinck himself thinks of it, what place in his mind it has in his whole scheme of literary production, the writer

cannot say. That is a matter as elusive as the man himself is elusive. To illustrate that elusiveness by a personal reminiscence:

It was six years ago, in the days when the world was happy with the blessedness of a peace that seemed likely to endure, and when the occasional cloud on the political horizon was regarded as nothing more than a mirage, that the writer and a friend — the latter one of the firm of M. Maeterlinck's American publishers — made a journey to the south of France for the purpose of paying their respects to the Belgian mystic in his Nice home. In London we had been advised by Mr. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, whose admirable translations have done so much to make Maeterlinck's name a household name to English-speaking readers. "Here is his latest letter," said Mr.

Teixeira. "It is dated from his villa in the Quartier des Beaumettes, which is the rising ground at the western end of the town. You will find him there; that is, if you succeed in finding him at all. For he is a very difficult man to find. That is one of his peculiarities."

It was the night before the departure from Nice. Our time was limited. At its môle in the swarming harbor of Marseilles, the Sant Anna, which was to carry us on its roundabout, five thousand mile journey, with New York as the ultimate destination, was preparing for its leaving of the next day. We started on the quest. At the hotel they could tell us nothing. The driver of the fiacre engaged was no better informed. Surprised but undaunted we were soon winding slowly between high stone walls, up the beautiful Beaumettes slope. From villa to villa we

travelled, to be met everywhere by puzzled, negative headshakes. "M. Maeterlinck? We do not know him. We have never heard of him. We do not think that he is of the Quartier. Perhaps if you enquire at the villa beyond you will learn something." For two hours in the darkness sweet scented by the breath of the semi-tropical plants and flowers, we kept up the search. But it was in vain. Here indeed was a prophet unknown in his own country. What was the reason for the mystery? Was there a vast conspiracy of silence and pretended ignorance on the part of his neighbors? Were solitude and freedom from interruption so necessary to his being that the great man had sworn them to secrecy? Or had he draped himself in some mysterious veil, some figurative coat of invisible green, through which the eyes of those who dwelt in the

Quartier des Beaumettes had never been able to see? We never found out. There was about the enigma something weird, something almost uncanny. We had been told to seek him in a mansion by the sea. We could hear the waves of the Mediterranean beating against the rocks below. But was it another ocean — an ocean of the Never, Never Land that had been meant?

It was many and many a year ago
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden lived, whom you all may know
By the name of Annabel Lee;
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me.

Is there a real Maeterlinck house? we asked ourselves. Or is his habitation of such dream stuff as the House of Usher? Is the land of Maeterlinck a material land,

or is it somewhere " hard by the dim lake of Auber, in the misty mid-region of Weir: down by the dark tarn of Auber, in the Ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir?"

THE MIRACLE OF SAINT ANTHONY

THE MIRACLE OF SAINT ANTHONY

The entrance-hall of a large old-fashioned house. Front-door on the left. At the back, a few steps with on the left a glass door with lace curtains, leading to the dining-room, and on the right a pair of folding glass doors, also with lace curtains, leading to the drawing-room. Against the wall, a leather-covered bench, one or two wooden stools and an umbrella-stand with hats and coats on it.

The curtain rises on VIRGINIE, the old *servant. Her skirts are pinned up, showing her bare legs and sabots; she is surrounded with brass pails, swabbing-cloths, brooms and scrubbing-brushes and is busily washing the*

flagstones composing the floor. She stops working from time to time, blows her nose noisily and wipes away a big tear.

There is a ring at the front-door. VIRGINIE *half opens it, revealing on the threshold a long lean old man, barefoot, bareheaded, with tangled hair and beard, and clad in a sort of frieze habit of faded brown, muddy, out of shape and patched.*

VIRGINIE

(*Holding the door ajar.*) This is the thirty-sixth time that I've been to the door. . . . Another beggar! Well, what is it?

SAINT ANTHONY

Let me in.

VIRGINIE

No, you're all over mud. Stay there. What do you want?

SAINT ANTHONY

I want to come in.

VIRGINIE

What for?

SAINT ANTHONY

To bring Mademoiselle Hortense back to life.

VIRGINIE

Bring Mademoiselle Hortense back to life? Get out! Who are you?

SAINT ANTHONY

Saint Anthony.

VIRGINIE

Of Padua?

SAINT ANTHONY

The same. (*His halo lights up and shines.*)

VIRGINIE

Lord bless me, it's true! (*She opens the door wide, falls on her knees and mutters a prayer, with her hands folded over the handle of her broom, after which she kisses the hem of the* SAINT'S *habit and continues, in a mechanical and bewildered sing-song.*) Saint Anthony, pray for us! Blessed Saint Anthony, look down upon us! Saint Anthony, pray for us!

SAINT ANTHONY

Shut the door.

VIRGINIE

(*Gets up crossly.*) Wipe your feet on the mat. (SAINT ANTHONY *wipes them*

awkwardly.) No, that won't do: rub them hard, rub them hard. (*She closes the front door.*)

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Pointing to the folding-doors.*) She is laid out in there.

VIRGINIE

(*In an astonished voice of delight.*) Yes, but how did you know? It's wonderful! She's there, in the drawing-room . . . The poor dear lady! She was only seventy-seven. That's no age at all, is it? . . . She was a very pious and deserving lady, you know. She suffered a great deal. . . . And she was very rich. They say she's left two million francs. That's a lot of money.

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

VIRGINIE

It all goes to her two nephews, Monsieur Gustave and Monsieur Achille. And she's left legacies to the Rector, to the church, to the beadle, to the sacristan, to the poor, to the Curate, to fourteen Jesuits and to all the servants, according to the length of time that they were with her. I get most. I've been in her service for thirty-three years, so I shall have three thousand three hundred francs. That's a good sum.

SAINT ANTHONY

It is.

VIRGINIE

She owed me nothing; she always paid me my wages regularly. You can say what you like, you won't find many mistresses who would do as much, after they

were dead and gone. She was one of the best of women. And we're burying her to-day. . . . Everybody has sent flowers. You ought to see the drawing-room. It's a glorious sight. There are flowers on the bed, on the table, on the chairs, on the piano. And nothing but white flowers: it's perfectly beautiful. We simply don't know where to put the wreaths. (*A ring at the door. She opens it and returns with two wreaths.*) Here are two more. (*Examines the wreaths and weighs them in her hands.*) Aren't these lovely? Just hold them a minute till I finish my work. (*She gives the wreaths to* SAINT ANTHONY, *who takes one in each hand obligingly.*) They're taking her to the cemetery this afternoon. Everything has to be nice and clean; and I've only time to . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

Take me to the corpse.

VIRGINIE

Take you to the corpse? Now?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

VIRGINIE

No, it can't be done. You must wait a bit; they are still at lunch.

SAINT ANTHONY

God bids me hurry; there is no time to lose.

VIRGINIE

What do you want with her?

SAINT ANTHONY

I've told you: I want to bring her back to life.

VIRGINIE

You want to bring her back to life? Seriously, do you want to raise her from the dead?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

VIRGINIE

But she's been dead three days.

SAINT ANTHONY

That's why I wish to raise her from the dead.

VIRGINIE

For her to live again as before?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

VIRGINIE

But then there won't be any heirs?

SAINT ANTHONY

Of course not.

VIRGINIE

But what will Monsieur Gustave say?

SAINT ANTHONY

I don't know.

VIRGINIE

And will she take back the three thousand three hundred francs which she gave me because she was dead?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes, of course.

VIRGINIE

That's a nuisance.

SAINT ANTHONY

Have you no other money, no savings?

VIRGINIE

Not a farthing. I have an invalid sister who takes every penny I earn.

SAINT ANTHONY

Well, if you are afraid of losing your three thousand francs . . .

VIRGINIE

Three thousand three hundred francs . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

If you're afraid of losing the money, then I won't raise her from the dead.

VIRGINIE

Couldn't I keep the money and you bring her back to life just the same?

SAINT ANTHONY

No, you must take it or leave it. I came down in answer to your prayers: it's for you to choose.

VIRGINIE

(*After a moment's reflection.*) Well, then, bring her back to life all the same. (*The* SAINT's *halo lights up and shines.*) What's the matter with you now?

SAINT ANTHONY

You have pleased me.

VIRGINIE

And then does that lantern thing light up?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes, of itself.

VIRGINIE

That's funny. . . . But don't stand so near the lace curtains, or you'll set them on fire.

SAINT ANTHONY

There's no danger: it's celestial flame. . . . Take me to the body.

VIRGINIE

I've told you: you must wait. I can't disturb them now. They're still at lunch.

SAINT ANTHONY

Who?

VIRGINIE

Why, my masters, of course! The whole family! First her two nephews, Monsieur Gustave and Monsieur Achille, with their wives and children, Monsieur Georges, Monsieur Alberic, Monsieur Alphonse and Monsieur Désiré. . . . And cousins, male and female, and the Rector and the Doctor and I don't know who besides: friends and relatives from a

distance, whom I'd never seen. They're very rich people.

SAINT ANTHONY

Really?

VIRGINIE

Did you notice the street?

SAINT ANTHONY

What street?

VIRGINIE

Why, ours, of course! The one in which our house stands.

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

VIRGINIE

It's a handsome street. Well, all the houses on the left-hand side of the street,

except the little one at the end, the baker's shop, belong to Mademoiselle Hortense. Those on the right-hand side are Monsieur Gustave's. There are twenty houses. That means money.

SAINT ANTHONY

No doubt.

VIRGINIE

(*Pointing to the halo.*) Look, your lantern thing is going out.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Feeling his halo.*) Yes, I'm afraid . . .

VIRGINIE

Doesn't it keep burning very long?

SAINT ANTHONY

It all depends upon the thoughts that feed it.

VIRGINIE

Yes, they own woods . . . and farms . . . and houses galore! Monsieur Gustave has a starch-factory: Gustave's Starch, you've heard of it, I expect! Oh, they're an amazingly well-off family. There are four of them who live on their incomes and do no business at all. That's splendid, that is! . . . And such friends and acquaintances and tenants! . . . Well, they've all come to the funeral, some of them from ever so far. There's one, I'm told, who travelled two days and two nights to get here in time. I'll show him to you: he has a lovely beard. . . . They're lunching here. They haven't finished yet. We can't disturb them. It's a great lunch: there are twenty-four of them sitting down to it. And I've seen the bill of fare: there's oysters, two soups, three entrées, crayfish in jelly, and trout

à la Schubert. Do you know what that is?

SAINT ANTHONY

No.

VIRGINIE

No more do I. They say it's very good; but it's not for you and me. There's no champagne, because of the mourning; but there's every other kind of wine. Mademoiselle Hortense had the best cellar in the town. I'll try and get you a good big glass, if they leave any; then you'll see the sort of thing. . . . Wait, I'll go and look what they're doing. (*She goes up the steps, draws back the curtains and peeps through the glass door on the left.*) I think they're beginning the trout, the trout *à la Schubert.* Oh, there's Joseph moving the pine-apple. They've a good two hours before them.

You'd better take a seat. (SAINT ANTHONY *goes to the leather-covered bench and is about to sit down.*) No, no, not there, you're much too dirty! Sit on the stool. I must get on with my work. (SAINT ANTHONY *sits down on a stool;* VIRGINIE *resumes her work and takes up a pail of water.*) Look out! Lift up your feet; I'm going to splash the water. . . . No, don't stay there; you're in my way; and it's not cleaned yet. . . . Go over there in the corner; push the stool against the wall. (SAINT ANTHONY *obediently does as she tells him.*) There, now you won't get your feet wet. Aren't you hungry?

SAINT ANTHONY

No, thank you, but I'm rather in a hurry; so go and tell your masters.

VIRGINIE

You're in a hurry? What have you got to do?

SAINT ANTHONY

Two or three miracles.

VIRGINIE

I can't tell them anything while they're at lunch. We must wait till they've had their coffee. Monsieur Gustave might be very angry. . . . I don't know what sort of reception he'll give you; he doesn't like having poor people in the house. You don't look over-prosperous.

SAINT ANTHONY

No, saints are never prosperous.

VIRGINIE

They have money given them, though.

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes, but not everything that's given to the saints reaches heaven.

VIRGINIE

You don't mean it? Then do the priests take what we give? I've heard it said; but I wouldn't believe . . . There now, I've got no water left! . . . I say!

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes?

VIRGINIE

Do you see a brass tap on your right?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

VIRGINIE

There's an empty pail beside it. Would you mind filling it for me?

SAINT ANTHONY

With pleasure.

VIRGINIE

You see, I'll never get all this cleaning done if some one doesn't help me. And there's nobody to help me: they're all losing their heads. . . . It's a terrible job, a death in the house! You know that as well as I do. A good thing it doesn't happen every day. . . . Monsieur Gustave will make a fuss if everything isn't clean and shining when his guests come through here. . . . He's not easy to please. . . . And I still have all the brass to do. . . . There, turn the tap; that's right. . . . Bring me the pail. . . . Aren't your feet cold? Tuck up your gown or it'll get wet. . . . Mind the wreaths; put them on the stool. . . . That's right, that's capital. (SAINT

ANTHONY *brings her the pail.*) Thanks, you're very kind. . . . I want one more. (*A sound of voices and of chairs being pushed back.*) Listen! What's that? I'll go and see. (*She goes to the glass door.*) Hallo, the master has got up! What can it be? Have they quarrelled? . . . No, the others are eating. . . . Joseph is filling up the Rector's glass. . . . They are finishing the trout. . . . The master is coming to the door. . . . Why, I might speak to him as he comes out and tell him that you . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes, do, please; tell him at once.

VIRGINIE

Very well. Put down the pail; I don't want it. Here, take this broom. Not like that! You'd better sit down again.

(SAINT ANTHONY *obeys and sits on the two wreaths lying on the stool.*) Hi, what are you doing? You're sitting on the wreaths!

SAINT ANTHONY

I beg your pardon. I'm a little short-sighted.

VIRGINIE

Clumsy! They're a pretty sight now! And what Monsieur Gustave will say when he sees those two wreaths! . . . Thank goodness, they're not so bad after all! We can put them right. Sit down over there; take them on your knees; and keep quite quiet. (*She goes down on her knees before the* SAINT.) I have a favour to ask you.

SAINT ANTHONY

Speak, don't be afraid.

VIRGINIE

Give me your blessing, while we are by ourselves. When the company comes out, I shall be sent away; and I sha'n't see you any more. Give me your blessing for myself alone. I am old and need it badly.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Rises and blesses her. His halo lights up.*) I bless you, my daughter, for you are good, simple of heart and mind, faultless, fearless, guileless in the presence of the great mysteries and faithful in the performance of your little duties. Go in peace, my child. Go and tell your masters. . . .

(*Exit* VIRGINIE. SAINT ANTHONY *sits down again on the stool.* Presently *the glass door opens and* GUSTAVE *enters, followed by* VIRGINIE.)

GUSTAVE

(*In a harsh and angry voice.*) What's all this? Who are you? What do you want?

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Rising humbly.*) I am Saint Anthony.

GUSTAVE

Are you mad?

SAINT ANTHONY

Of Padua.

GUSTAVE

What sort of joke is this? I am in no mood for laughing. Have you been drinking? Come, what are you here for? What do you want? . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

I want to raise your aunt from the dead.

GUSTAVE

What? Raise my aunt from the dead? (*To* VIRGINIE.) He's drunk. Why did you let him in? (*To* SAINT ANTHONY.) Look here, my man, be sensible: we have no time for jesting. My aunt is to be buried to-day; you can call again to-morrow. Here. Here's a trifle for you.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*With gentle persistence.*) I must raise her from the dead to-day.

GUSTAVE

All right, presently, after the ceremony! Come, here's the door.

SAINT ANTHONY

I shall not leave until I have brought her back to life.

GUSTAVE

(*Blazing out.*) Look here, I've had enough of this! You're getting tiresome! My guests are waiting for me. (*He opens the front-door.*) Here's the door. Look sharp, please!

SAINT ANTHONY

I shall not leave until I have brought her back to life.

GUSTAVE

Oh, won't you? We'll see about that. (*Opens the glass door and calls out.*) Joseph!

JOSEPH

(*Appears in the doorway, with a large steaming dish in his hands.*) Yes, sir?

GUSTAVE

(*Glancing at the dish.*) What's that?

JOSEPH

The partridges, sir.

GUSTAVE

Give the dish to Virginie and turn this drunken fellow out of doors. And be quick about it.

JOSEPH

(*Handing* VIRGINIE *the dish.*) Very good, sir. (*Going up to the* SAINT.) Come on, old fellow, didn't you hear? It's all very well getting tight; you've got to pull yourself together now. Come on! Get out of this! You'd better come quietly, or you'll regret it: I can be pretty rough when I like. You won't? You just wait! Open the door, Virginie. . . .

GUSTAVE

Wait, I'll open it. (*Opens the street-door.*)

JOSEPH

That's it; we'll soon get rid of him now. (*Turning up his sleeves and spitting in his hands.*) I'm going to show you what's what. (*He grasps* SAINT ANTHONY *firmly, with the intention of flinging him into the street. The* SAINT *stands rooted to the spot,* JOSEPH *looks nonplussed.*) Sir!

GUSTAVE

What's the matter?

JOSEPH

I don't know, sir. He seems fixed. I can't get him to budge.

GUSTAVE

I'll help you. (*Both of them try to push* SAINT ANTHONY *out, but he remains immovable.* GUSTAVE, *in an undertone.*) Well, upon my soul! He's dangerous,

Be careful. He has the strength of a Hercules. Let's try being gentle with him. (*To* SAINT ANTHONY.) Listen to me, my friend. You understand, don't you, that, on a day like this, when we're burying my aunt, my poor dear aunt . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

I have come to raise her from the dead . . .

GUSTAVE

But you understand, surely, that this is not the moment. . . . The partridges are getting cold, the guests are waiting. Besides we are not in the mood for laughing.

ACHILLE

(*Appears at the top of the steps, napkin in hand.*) What's the matter, Gustave? What's up? We're waiting for the partridges.

GUSTAVE

Our friend here refuses to go away.

ACHILLE

Is he boozed?

GUSTAVE

Well, of course.

ACHILLE

Kick him out and have done with it. I don't see why our good luncheon should be spoilt for the sake of a dirty drunkard.

GUSTAVE

He won't go.

ACHILLE

What's that? Won't go? We'll soon see about that! . . .

GUSTAV

All right, you try.

ACHILLE

I'm not going to tackle a dirty tramp like him. But there's Joseph, there's the coachman.

GUSTAVE

We have tried; it's no use; and, short of employing absolute violence . . .

(*More* GUESTS *appear at the door, most of them with their mouths full, some with their napkins under their arms, others with them tucked under their chins.*)

A GUEST

What's it all about?

ANOTHER

What are you doing, Gustave?

ANOTHER

What does the fellow want?

ANOTHER

Where has he sprung from?

GUSTAVE

He won't go away. It's another of Virginie's blunders. As soon as she catches sight of a beggar, she loses her head. It's really too silly. She let this madman in; and he insists on seeing Aunt Hortense and raising her from the dead.

A GUEST

You should send for the police. Why don't you?

GUSTAVE

No, no; no scandal! I don't want the police in the house on a day like this.

ACHILLE

(*Changing his tone.*) Gustave.

GUSTAVE

Well?

ACHILLE

Have you noticed that two or three of the flags are cracked, over there on the left, at the end of the hall?

GUSTAVE

Yes, I know. It doesn't matter; I'm going to have a mosaic floor to take the place of the flags.

ACHILLE

That'll look more cheerful . . .

GUSTAVE

And, better still, more modern. Instead of that door, with the lace curtains, I thought of having a painted window illustrating Hunting, Industry and Progress, with a garland of fruit and game.

ACHILLE

Yes, that will be very nice.

GUSTAVE

As for my office, I intend to have it in there (*pointing to the folding-doors*), with the clerks' office opposite.

ACHILLE

When shall you move in?

GUSTAVE

A few days after the funeral. It would not do to come in the very next day.

ACHILLE

No. But meanwhile we must get rid of this chap.

GUSTAVE

He's made himself quite at home.

ACHILLE

(*To* SAINT ANTHONY.) Won't you have a chair?

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Naïvely.*) No, thank you. I'm not tired.

ACHILLE

Leave him to me. I'll soon dispose of him. (*Approaching the* SAINT, *in a friendly tone.*) Come, my friend, tell us who you are.

SAINT ANTHONY

I am Saint Anthony.

ACHILLE

Yes, yes, you're right. (*To the others.*) He sticks to it, but he's quite harmless. (*Noticing the* RECTOR *among the* GUESTS *who have crowded around* SAINT ANTHONY *and giving him an artful and chaffing look.*) And here's the Rector; he knows you, and wants to pay you his respects. Saints are your business,

Father: I know more about ploughs and traction-engines. Here's an emissary from heaven, Father, great Saint Anthony in person, who would like a word with you. (*Under his breath to the* Rector.) We want to get him quietly to the door, without letting him know. Once he is outside, good-bye.

The Rector

(*In an unctuously paternal tone.*) Great Saint Anthony, your humble servant bids you welcome to this world, which you have deigned to honour with your celestial presence. What does your Holiness wish?

Saint Anthony

To raise Mademoiselle Hortense from the dead.

The Rector

It's true that she's dead, poor lady!

Well, the miracle should present no difficulty to the greatest of our saints. The dear departed had a particular devotion to you. I will take you to her, if your Holiness will be good enough to come with me. (*He goes to the street-door and beckons to* SAINT ANTHONY.) This way, please.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Pointing to the folding-doors.*) No, that way, in there. . . .

THE RECTOR

(*Still more unctuously.*) Your Holiness will pardon me if I venture to contradict you, but the corpse, because of the influx of visitors, has been removed to the house opposite, which, I may mention, also belonged to the dear departed.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Pointing to the folding-doors.*) She is in there.

THE RECTOR

(*More and more unctuously.*) Let me beg your Holiness, in order to convince yourself to the contrary, to accompany me for a moment into the street, where you will see the candles and the black hangings . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Imperturbably, still pointing to the folding-doors.*) That is where I shall go.

A GUEST

Did you ever hear any one like him?

GUSTAVE

He's going a trifle too far.

A Guest

Let us open the door and all of us push him out together.

Gustave

No, no; no scene! He might lose his temper. He's very dangerous; he's enormously strong. Keep your hands off him. Joseph and I, who are no weaklings, either of us, couldn't make him move an inch. It's funny, but he seems rooted to the soil.

Achille

But who told him that the corpse was in there?

Gustave

Virginie, of course; she's been babbling for all she's worth.

Virginie

Me, sir? Excuse me, sir, not me; I was

attending to my work. I answered yes and no, nothing else. . . . Didn't I, Saint Anthony? (*The* SAINT *makes no reply.*) Well, can't you answer when you're asked a civil question?

SAINT ANTHONY

She did not tell me.

VIRGINIE

There, you see! He's a saint; he knew it all beforehand. I tell you, there's nothing he doesn't know.

ACHILLE

(*Going to the* SAINT *and tapping him amicably on the shoulder.*) Now then, my fine fellow, come on; put your best foot forward, what!

THE GUESTS

Will he go, or won't he?

ACHILLE

I have an idea.

GUSTAVE

What's that?

ACHILLE

Where's the doctor?

A GUEST

He's still at table; he's finishing up the trout. . . .

GUSTAVE

(*To* JOSEPH.) Go and fetch him. (*Exit* JOSEPH.) You're right, he's a madman; it's the doctor's business. (*Enter* JOSEPH *and the* DOCTOR.)

THE DOCTOR

(*Appears with his mouth full and his napkin tucked under his chin.*) What's

up? Is he mad? Is he ill? Is he drunk? (*Looking the* SAINT *over.*) Why, it's a beggar! I'm of no use in his case. Well, my friend, are things going badly? Is there something we want?

SAINT ANTHONY

I want to raise Mademoiselle Hortense from the dead.

THE DOCTOR

Ah, I see you're not a medical man! May I have your hand? (*Feels the* SAINT'S *pulse.*) Any pain?

SAINT ANTHONY

No.

THE DOCTOR

(*Feeling his head and forehead.*) And here? Does it hurt when I press my finger?

SAINT ANTHONY

No.

THE DOCTOR

Excellent, excellent! Do you ever feel giddy?

SAINT ANTHONY

Never.

THE DOCTOR

And in the past . . . no accident, at any time? Let's have a look at your chest. Say "Ah!" That's right. Once more; deep breath. Deeper, deeper. That's right. . . . And what is it you want, my man?

SAINT ANTHONY

To go into that room.

THE DOCTOR

What for?

SAINT ANTHONY

To raise Mademoiselle Hortense from the dead.

THE DOCTOR

She's not there.

SAINT ANTHONY

She is there. I see her.

GUSTAVE

He sticks to it.

ACHILLE

Couldn't you give him a hypodermic injection?

THE DOCTOR

What for?

ACHILLE

To send him to sleep. Then we would put him in the street.

THE DOCTOR

No, no; no nonsense. Besides, it's dangerous.

ACHILLE

That's his look out, not ours. We're not paid to take care of madmen, tramps or drunkards.

THE DOCTOR

Shall I give you my opinion?

GUSTAVE

I wish you would.

THE DOCTOR

We have to do with a madman, a rather feeble-minded and quite harmless monomaniac, who may become dangerous, however, if we thwart him. I know the type. . . . We are among ourselves; moreover, strange though the experiment which he proposes may seem, it involves no lack of

respect for the dear departed. . . . That being so, I don't see why, in order to avoid any scandal and since he's asking such a simple thing, we shouldn't allow him to go into the room for a moment.

GUSTAVE

Never! What's the world coming to, if the first person that comes along can force his way like this into a respectable household, under the ridiculous pretext of bringing back to life a dead woman who has never done him any harm?

THE DOCTOR

As you please; it's for you to decide. On the one hand, you have an inevitable scandal, for nothing will make him give up his idea; on the other, a small concession which costs you nothing.

ACHILLE

The doctor's right. . . .

THE DOCTOR

There's nothing to be afraid of. I'll take the whole responsibility. Besides, we shall all be there and we shall go in with him.

GUSTAVE

Very well, then, let's have done with it. . . . But, whatever happens, don't let this ludicrous incident get about, will you?

ACHILLE

Aunt Hortense's jewels are put out on the mantelpiece. . . .

GUSTAVE

I know. I'll keep an eye on them, for I confess that I don't trust him. (*To* SAINT ANTHONY.) It's this way, come in. But be quick about it; we haven't lunched yet.

(GUSTAVE *opens the folding-doors,*

revealing the drawing-room, in which is a large four-poster, with MADEMOISELLE HORTENSE's body *laid out upon it. Two lighted candles, a crucifix, a branch of palm, wreaths. At the back, a glass door leading to the garden.* ALL *go in,* SAINT ANTHONY and GUSTAVE *last.*)

GUSTAVE

Here is the body of the dear departed. As you see, she's quite dead. Are you satisfied? . . . And now leave us. Let us cut short the experiment. (*To* JOSEPH.) Show the gentleman out by the garden-door.

SAINT ANTHONY

Allow me. (*He walks into the middle of the room and stands at the foot of the*

bed. Turning to the corpse and speaking in a loud, grave voice.) Arise!

GUSTAVE

There, that'll do! We can't stand by and allow a stranger to outrage our most sacred feelings; and I ask you once more, for the last time . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

Allow me, please! (*He goes nearer the bed and raises his voice more authoritatively.*) Arise!

GUSTAVE

(*Losing his patience.*) That's enough! We'll end by quarrelling. . . . Come, this way: the door's over here.

SAINT ANTHONY

Allow me! . . . She is very far away. (*In a deeper and more commanding tone.*) Mademoiselle Hortense, return and arise from the dead.

(*To the general amazement, the dead woman first makes a slight movement and then opens her eyes, unfolds her hands, raises herself slowly to a sitting posture, puts her night-cap straight and looks round the room with a crabbed and discontented air. Next she begins quietly to scratch at a bit of candle-grease which she has discovered on the sleeve of her night-gown. There is a moment of overpowering silence; then* VIRGINIE *starts from the bewildered group, runs up to the bed and flings herself into the arms of the woman restored to life.*)

VIRGINIE

Mademoiselle Hortense! She's alive! Look, she's scratching at a bit of candle-

grease; she's feeling for her glasses. . . . Here they are! Here they are! . . . Saint Anthony! Saint Anthony! . . . A miracle! A miracle! . . . On your knees! On your knees!

GUSTAVE

Come, come, be still! . . . Don't talk nonsense! . . . This is no time for . . .

ACHILLE

There's no denying it, she's alive.

A GUEST

But it's not possible! What has he done to her?

GUSTAVE

You can't take it seriously. She'll have a relapse.

ACHILLE

No, no, I assure you. Just see how she's staring at us.

GUSTAVE

I don't believe it yet. What are we coming to? Where are the laws of nature? Doctor, what do you say?

THE DOCTOR

(*Embarrassed.*) What do I say? What would you have me say? It doesn't concern me, it's not my business. It's absurd and, at the same time, quite simple. If she's alive, then she was never dead. There's no reason to be amazed and proclaim a miracle.

GUSTAVE

But you yourself said . . .

THE DOCTOR

I said, I said . . . To begin with, I said nothing positive; and I would have you observe that I have not signed the death-certificate. I even had very serious

doubts, but I would not tell you of them, lest I should raise false hopes. . . . In any case, all this proves nothing; and it is very unlikely that she will live long.

ACHILLE

Meanwhile we must accept the evidence, the happy evidence, of our senses.

VIRGINIE

Yes, yes, we must believe it! There's not a doubt left! I told you he was a saint, a great saint! Just look at her! She's alive and as fresh as a rose in June!

GUSTAVE

(*Going to the bed and kissing* MADEMOISELLE HORTENSE.) Aunt, my dear aunt, is it really you?

ACHILLE

(*Going to the bed.*) Do you know me,

aunt? I am Achille, your nephew, Achille.

LÉONTINE

And me, auntie? I am your old niece Léontine.

VALENTINE

And me, my dear godmother, do you know me? I am little Valentine, to whom you left all your silver.

GUSTAVE

She's smiling.

ACHILLE

Not at all, she looks displeased.

GUSTAVE

But she recognizes us all.

ACHILLE

(*Seeing* MADEMOISELLE HORTENSE *open her mouth and move her lips.*) Listen! She's going to speak.

VIRGINIE

Heavenly Father! . . . And she has seen God! . . . She'll tell us about the delights of Paradise! . . . On your knees! On your knees!

ACHILLE

Listen! Listen!

MADEMOISELLE HORTENSE

(*Eyeing* SAINT ANTHONY *with scorn and disgust. In a shrill and angry voice.*) Who is this person? Who has dared to let a bare-footed tramp into my drawing-room? He's dirtied all the carpets as it is! . . . Put him out at once! . . . Virginie, how often have I told you not to let beggars . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Raising his hand imperiously.*) Silence!

(*The* AUNT *stops suddenly in the middle of her sentence, and sits up open-mouthed, unable to utter a sound.*)

GUSTAVE

You must forgive her, she does not yet know how much she owes you. But we, we know. There's no question but that what you have done was more than most people could have done. It may have been an accident or . . . something else; upon my word, I don't know. But what I do know is that I am proud and happy to shake you by the hand.

SAINT ANTHONY

I should like to go, please. I have work to do.

GUSTAVE

Oh, don't be in such a hurry! We can't let you go like this. You shall not

leave empty-handed. I don't know what my aunt will give you: that's her affair: I cannot promise anything in her name. But, for my part, I will consult my brother-in-law; and, whether it be a coincidence or . . . something else, we will pay for the coincidence without quibbling about the amount; and you shall have no reason to regret what you have done. That's so, Achille, isn't it?

ACHILLE

Certainly, you will not regret it, on the contrary.

GUSTAVE

We are not tremendously well off; we have wives and children and we have had our disappointments; but, after all, we know how to recognize a kindness; and, if it were only for the honour of the family, it would never do to have it said that a

stranger, however poor, came and did us a service without receiving a reward, a decent reward, the best reward that in us lies, a reward in proportion to our means, which, I repeat, are limited. . . . Oh, I know, there are services which nothing can repay and which are not paid for: you need not tell me that! I know it, I know it: don't interrupt me. But that's no reason why we should not do something. . . . Come, what do you think we owe you? Name your own figure. Of course, you must not ask for anything excessive; we couldn't give it you; but whatever seems reasonable you shall have.

ACHILLE

My brother-in-law is right: but, while the matter is arranging, I propose to make a little collection among ourselves. That

won't prejudice you in any way and will keep you going for a time.

SAINT ANTHONY

I want to go away, please. I have other work to do.

GUSTAVE

Other work to do! Other work to do! What work can you have to do? . . . No, I can't have that; and it's not nice of you to suggest it. What would people say if they heard that we let you go like this after restoring the dear departed to us? If you won't take money — and I understand your delicacy of feeling and approve of it — at least you will do us the pleasure of accepting a little keepsake? Oh, don't be afraid: just a trifle, a cigar-holder, or a tie-pin, or a meerschaum pipe. I could have your name and address and the date engraved on it.

SAINT ANTHONY

No, thank you. I can accept nothing.

GUSTAVE

Do you mean that?

SAINT ANTHONY

I do.

ACHILLE

(*Taking out his cigar-case.*) At any rate, you will do us the pleasure of smoking a cigar with us. You can't refuse that.

SAINT ANTHONY

Thank you, I do not smoke.

GUSTAVE

You're most discouraging. Still, what would you like? You must have a wish of some sort. You have only to speak, for everything is yours in this house, which you have filled with gladness. It's all yours. I can't say more than that. At

least, all that one can honestly part with. . . . Why, it's an insult to leave us like this!

ACHILLE

Look here, I have an idea that's not half bad. As our friend won't accept anything — and, like my brother-in-law, I understand his delicacy, of which, I am sure, we all approve; for life can't be paid for and has no price — well, since he has shown a disinterested nature which at once makes him our equal, what I want to know is this: why should he not do us the honour of sitting down with us and helping us finish a luncheon which he has so happily interrupted! . . . What do you all say? . . . (*Murmurs of restrained approval.*)

GUSTAVE

That's it! The very thing! That settles everything! How clever of you

to think of it! . . . (*To* SAINT ANTHONY.) Well, what do you say? . . . By squeezing a bit, we can easily make room for you. You shall have the seat of honour. The partridges will be cold, but no matter: you have a good appetite, I feel sure! . . . Well, that's arranged, eh? There will be no ceremony: we're decent people and easy-going, as you see. . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

No, really. You must excuse me. I'm sorry, I can't. I'm expected elsewhere.

GUSTAVE

Oh, come, you can't refuse us this! Besides, who's expecting you?

SAINT ANTHONY

Another corpse.

GUSTAVE

A corpse! Another corpse! It won't run away! Surely you're not going to put a corpse before us! To throw us over for a corpse!

ACHILLE

No, I see what it is. You would rather go down to the kitchen, wouldn't you? You'd feel more comfortable there.

GUSTAVE

Then he can come up afterwards for coffee.

ACHILLE

Ah, he's not refusing! He prefers that! I understand. Virginie, leave your mistress — she doesn't need you now — and take the gentleman down to your kitchen. Give him some of everything. (*He taps the* SAINT *familiarly on the stomach.*) Ha, ha! You and Virginie

are going to have a jolly good time together! I guessed right, didn't I, you old rogue you! You old sly-boots!

VIRGINIE

(*In a voice of alarm.*) Sir!

GUSTAVE

What is it?

VIRGINIE

I don't know, but Mademoiselle Hortense has lost her speech again.

GUSTAVE

What? She's lost her speech?

VIRGINIE

Yes, sir, look. . . . She's opening her mouth and moving her lips and working her hands but her voice has gone.

GUSTAVE

What is it, aunt? Is there something

you want to tell us? (*She nods assent.*) And you can't? There, there, make an effort; it's a temporary paralysis, that's all. It will soon pass. (*She makes a sign that she can no longer speak.*) What's the matter with you? What do want? (*To* SAINT ANTHONY.) What's the meaning of this?

SAINT ANTHONY

She will never speak again.

GUSTAVE

She will never speak again? But she has been speaking. You heard her. She even gave you a piece of her mind.

SAINT ANTHONY

It was an oversight on my part. She won't have her voice again.

GUSTAVE

Can't you restore it to her?

SAINT ANTHONY

No.

GUSTAVE

And when will it come back?

SAINT ANTHONY

Never.

GUSTAVE

What! Will she remain dumb to the end of her days?

SAINT ANTHONY

Yes.

GUSTAVE

Why?

SAINT ANTHONY

She has beheld mysteries which she may not reveal.

GUSTAVE

Mysteries? What mysteries?

SAINT ANTHONY

The mysteries of the dead.

GUSTAVE

The mysteries of the dead? This is a fresh joke. What do you take us for? No, no, my lad, this won't do! She spoke; we all heard her; we have witnesses. You have, of malice prepense, deprived her of her power of speech, with an object which I am beginning to see through. You'll just restore it at once, or . . .

ACHILLE

It was really not worth while bringing her back to life, to give her to us in this condition.

GUSTAVE

If you could not give her back to us as she was before your stupid and clumsy

interference, you would have done better not to have meddled.

ACHILLE

It was a bad action.

GUSTAVE

An abuse of confidence.

ACHILLE

An abuse of confidence: that's what it was. There is no excuse for it.

GUSTAVE

You're expecting to blackmail us, perhaps?

ACHILLE

I suppose you think you're dealing with a pack of fools?

GUSTAVE

Who asked you to come? I hate saying it, but I would rather see her dead

than have her back in this state. It's too cruel, too painful for those who love her. You can't come like this, under the pretence of working a miracle, and disturb the peace of the people who have done you no harm, bringing unhappiness upon them! A nice thing. But he laughs best who laughs last!

THE DOCTOR

Allow me. Calm yourselves. The man has done wrong, there's no doubt of that; but we must not blame him: he is probably unaccountable for his actions. (*Going up to* SAINT ANTHONY.) Just let me examine your eyes, my friend. That's it: I knew it! I would not interfere while everybody was thanking him, much too cordially, for the miraculous resurrection which he had wrought. I did not wish to appear to meddle with what does not con-

cern me. I knew what was what; and you see, as I do, that she was not dead at all. There is nothing supernatural or mysterious about all this. It simply means that the fellow possesses rather unusual hypnotic powers; and he has abused them in order to indulge in a hoax which may be self-interested and which, in any case, is out of place. He came at the right moment, that is all; and it is highly probable that, had he not been here, you and I would have worked the miracle, if miracle there be.

GUSTAVE

Well, what are we to do?

THE DOCTOR

Why, prevent him from doing further mischief by having him locked up! The man's dangerous!

GUSTAVE

You're right; we must put a stop to this; besides, I've had enough of it. . . . Joseph!

JOSEPH

Sir?

GUSTAVE

Run to the police-station at the corner; fetch two policemen; tell them to bring a pair of handcuffs with them. He's a dangerous fellow and capable of everything, as he has shown us only too plainly.

JOSEPH

Very well, sir. (*He runs out.*)

SAINT ANTHONY

I beg leave to withdraw.

GUSTAVE

That's right, old chap, play the innocent. It's time you did. Yes, you can withdraw;

and with a first-class escort. You just wait and see.

(*Enter* JOSEPH, *followed by a* SERGEANT OF POLICE *and a* POLICEMAN.)

THE SERGEANT

(*Pointing to* SAINT ANTHONY.) *Is* this the criminal?

GUSTAVE

That's the man.

THE SERGEANT

(*Touching* SAINT ANTHONY *on the shoulder.*) Where are your papers?

SAINT ANTHONY

What papers?

POLICEMAN

You haven't any? I knew it. What's your name?

SAINT ANTHONY

Saint Anthony.

THE SERGEANT

Saint what? Saint Anthony? That's no name for a Christian. I want the other, your real name.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Very gently.*) I have no other.

THE SERGEANT

Keep a civil tongue in your head, will you? Where did you steal that dressing-gown?

SAINT ANTHONY

I didn't steal it. It's mine.

THE SERGEANT

Then it's I who am lying? Is that what you mean? Say it; don't mind me!

SAINT ANTHONY

I don't know. I think . . . Perhaps you are mistaken.

THE SERGEANT

I'm making a note of your impertinent observations. . . . Where do you hail from?

SAINT ANTHONY

From Padua.

THE SERGEANT

Padua? Where's that? What department?

GUSTAVE

It's in Italy.

THE SERGEANT

I know, I know. I wanted to make him say it. So you're an Italian. I thought as much. Where did you last come from?

SAINT ANTHONY

From Paradise.

THE SERGEANT

What Paradise? Where is that land of malefactors?

SAINT ANTHONY

It is the place to which the souls of those who have died in the Lord ascend after their death.

THE SERGEANT

I see, I see, I understand! You're coming the artful over me! You're pulling my leg! First you're impudent and now you're being clever! Very well, your case is quite clear: we'll soon settle it. . . . (*To Gustave.*) Let's hear what he has done. What has he stolen?

GUSTAVE

I can't yet say for certain that he has stolen anything; I haven't had time to take stock of things; and I don't like to accuse him without being sure. We must be just before all things. But he has done something more serious.

THE SERGEANT

I never doubted it.

GUSTAVE

You know the loss which we have suffered. While we were mourning the dear departed and finishing our lunch, he made his way into the house under some pretext or other, with intentions which you can easily guess. He took advantage of the maid's simplicity and credulousness to have the door opened of the room where the body was laid out. He obviously hoped to turn our disorder and grief to account in order to fish in troubled waters and make a haul. He may have learnt through an accomplice that our aunt's jewels and silver were put out on the mantelpiece. Unfortunately for him, our aunt was not dead. And, suddenly, seeing this repellent figure in her room, she woke up, cried out and spoke to him roundly and pluckily. Then, to take revenge for

his discomfiture, I don't know how — the doctor will explain — he deprived her of the use of her speech; and, notwithstanding our entreaties, he refuses to restore it to her, naturally hoping to make us pay through the nose. Mind you, I am making no accusations; I am simply stating the facts. As for the rest, you can ask the doctor.

THE DOCTOR

I will furnish all the necessary explanations before the Commissary; if he wishes it, I will draw up a report.

ACHILLE

Meanwhile, there's no mistake about it: he's either a criminal or a madman, perhaps both. In any case, he's a dangerous person who must absolutely be locked up.

THE SERGEANT

That's quite clear. We'll get rid of him for you. (*To the* POLICEMAN.) Rabutteau!

POLICEMAN

Yes, Sergeant.

THE SERGEANT

The handcuffs.

GUSTAVE

Sergeant, it was very good of you and your mate to come round. Before leaving us, you must do us the pleasure of taking a glass of something with us.

THE SERGEANT

We won't say no to that, eh, Rabutteau?

Especially as the prisoner looks like a tough customer.

GUSTAVE

Joseph, bring a bottle and some glasses. (*Exit* JOSEPH.) We will all drink to my aunt's recovery.

THE SERGEANT

It'll do us no harm in this weather.

GUSTAVE

Is it still raining?

THE SERGEANT

In torrents. I've only come the length of the street; look at my cape.

POLICEMAN

You can't tell if it's raining or snowing, but it's worse than either.

(*Enter* JOSEPH *with a tray filled with glasses, which he hands round.*)

THE SERGEANT

(*Raising his glass.*) Ladies and gentlemen, your very good health!

GUSTAVE

(*Touching glasses with the* SERGEANT.) Sergeant, your health! (*They all touch glasses with the* SERGEANT.) Have another?

THE SERGEANT

I don't mind. (*Smacking his lips.*) That's good wine, that is!

SAINT ANTHONY

I'm thirsty. I should like a glass of water.

THE SERGEANT

(*Grinning.*) A glass of water! D'ye hear him? You shall have some water, my lad; you wait till we're outside; it'll come pouring into your mouth. . . . Come, we've hung around long enough. . . . Rabutteau, the handcuffs; and you, put out your hands . . .

SAINT ANTHONY

But I haven't . . .

THE SERGEANT

What! Resistance and protests!

That's the last straw! They're all alike! (*A ring at the front-door.*)

GUSTAVE

A ring at the bell! (JOSEPH *goes to the front-door.*) What's the time? Perhaps it's the first guests.

ACHILLE

Hardly. It's not three yet. (*Enter the* COMMISSARY OF POLICE.) Hallo, it's Monsieur Mitrou, the Commissary of Police!

THE COMMISSARY

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I heard . . . (*Catching sight of* SAINT ANTHONY.) Why, I thought as much: it's Saint Anthony himself, the great Saint Anthony of Padua! . . .

GUSTAVE

You know him, then?

THE COMMISSARY

Know him? I should think I did know him! It's the third time that he's escaped. . . . You know, he's a little . . . (*He taps his forehead with his finger.*) And at each escape he does the same tricks: he cures the sick, heals cripples, practises medicine without a license — in short, commits a number of illegal actions . . . (*Goes up to* SAINT ANTHONY *and examines him more attentively.*) Yes, it's he . . . Or at least . . . But he has changed a good deal since his last escapade. . . . Anyway, if it's not he, it must be his brother. . . . There's something that's not quite clear to me. We'll look into it at the police-station. Come

along, I'm in a hurry; come along, lads, quick, to the station, to the station!

GUSTAVE

Better let him out this way, through the garden; it'll attract less notice. (JOSEPH *opens the garden door, admitting a whirl of rain, sleet and wind.*)

ACHILLE

Brrr, what weather! It's raining, snowing, hailing! (*They push* SAINT ANTHONY *to the door.*)

VIRGINIE

(*Running up.*) But, sir, the poor man! . . . Look, he's barefooted!

GUSTAVE

Well, what of it? Do you want us to send for a carriage? Or a shrine, perhaps?

VIRGINIE

No, I'll lend him my sabots. Take them, Saint Anthony; I have another pair.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Putting on the sabots.*) Thank you. (*His halo lights up.*)

VIRGINIE

And are you putting nothing on your head? You'll catch cold.

SAINT ANTHONY

I haven't anything.

VIRGINIE

Take my little shawl. I'll run and fetch you my umbrella. (*She hurries out.*)

ACHILLE

The old fool.

GUSTAVE

This is all very well, but meanwhile we're standing in the devil of a draught. . . . Come, take him to the station and let's have an end of this.

VIRGINIE

(*Returning with an enormous umbrella, which she offers to* SAINT ANTHONY.) Here's my umbrella.

SAINT ANTHONY

(*Showing his hands.*) They've fastened my hands.

VIRGINIE

I'll hold it for you. (*Standing on the threshold, she opens the umbrella to shelter* SAINT ANTHONY, *who goes out between the two* POLICEMEN, *followed by the* COMMISSARY. *The* SAINT'S *halo shines under the umbrella; and the group moves away over the snow in the garden.*)

GUSTAVE

(*Closing the door.*) At last!

ACHILLE

A good riddance to bad rubbish!

GUSTAVE

(*Going to the bed.*) Well, aunt?

ACHILLE

What's the matter with her? She's sinking, she's falling back on the bed!

THE DOCTOR

(*Hurrying forward.*) I don't know . . . I'm afraid . . .

GUSTAVE

(*Leaning over the bed.*) Aunt, aunt! . . . Well?

THE DOCTOR

This time she is really dead. I told you so.

GUSTAVE

Impossible!

ACHILLE

But, doctor, look here! Is there nothing to be done?

THE DOCTOR

Nothing at all, I fear.

(*A pause during which all gather round the bed.*)

GUSTAVE

(*The first to recover his self-possession.*) What a day! . . .

ACHILLE

Hark to the storm! . . .

GUSTAVE

After all, we were a little unkind to the poor beggar. If you come to think of it, he really did us no harm!

CURTAIN

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